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ABSTRACT

This examination of the issues of reform pertinent to adult and developmental education focuses largely on the activities and recommendations of the Learning, Assessment, Retention Consortium (LARC) of California with respect to these concerns. The first sections of the paper address the problem of underprepared college students, and the policy issues that have emerged in the debate over literacy. The next section considers the question of educational reform, focusing on top-down responses in areas such as program evaluation, institutional policies on credit and advisement, increased academic rigor, and revised teacher roles; and bottom-up responses which value college-based efforts, collaboration, and teaching and learning strategies. Following an overview of major trends in remediation, political questions and complaints about the current state of remedial/developmental education are highlighted. The next sections focus on LARC's responses to the questions central to the current debate over remedial education, looking at: (1) the major objectives of the consortium; (2) the premises developed about remedial education; (3) major strategies, i.e., a comprehensive assessment, placement, learning, follow-up system; identification and sharing of promising practices; use of faculty teams to increase credibility; use of visiting teams for training; information dissemination; and database development; (4) study findings regarding retention and remediation; and (5) special projects. Finally, 10 activities are suggested to provide purpose for remedial education. (LAL)

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REMEDIATION, RETENTION, RIGOR AND REFORM - THE NEW 3 R's PLUS ONE

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I am fond of the Peanuts cartoons as commentaries on problems and issues. One recent cartoon depicted the nature of the issues of interest to us here today.

-Lucy was taking an English test - she picked up the test and read: Direct object, indirect object, tenses, parallel structure, coordination - then she exclaimed ***MAYDAY! MAYDAY! MAYDAY!***

Being in postsecondary education today is not unlike Lucy's situation. We not only share her dilemma but we also have to find the cause and a cure for it.

The current climate of postsecondary education is characterized by uncertainty, uncertainty about which students to serve, how to serve them and how effective are the programs that serve them. This uncertainty is reflected in new mandates for accountability in services, courses and programs and unprecedented intrusion by agencies and groups outside of education.

American society, through various study groups and national commissions is now expressing strong dissatisfaction with education. Considerable national interest exists for defining the competencies to be obtained from a college education (Keimig, 1983). Increasingly there are calls for raising the quality of instruction, increasing the levels of student competencies and returning to basic education.

HOWEVER, RETURNING TO THE BASICS IS INVOLVING NEW COMPLEXITIES RATHER THAN OLD SIMPLICITIES. (Preer, 1983). Attitudes, beliefs, priorities, and demands are shifting. Those realities that framed education in the past are giving way to new ones.

The underprepared students, now a majority of students in all post secondary education institutions, are the center of this upheaval.

We have come together as a group today because we have a common interest in the problem and treatment of this large group of unskilled students who are affecting institutional decisions and your programs. We need to know the extent of the problem so that we can create a prescription for improvement.

HOW BAD IS THE PROBLEM?

A popular trend in California is called writing across the curriculum; the attempt to improve writing skills by having all instructors assign essays to their classes. Recently a science instructor assigned writing in this class. He received this essay in response:

There are three main cavities in the body;
One, the cranium, where the brains are stored,
if there are any.

Two, the boracic cavity, where the heart and lungs
are stored and

Three, the abominable cavity, where the bowels
are stored of which there are 5: A,E,I,O, and U
and sometimes WHY.

While the cure for the literacy problems of this student is by no means clear, the demands for increasing his literacy skills are undeniable. A typical community college student generally has not earned above a C grade in high school, took no math courses above algebra, passed the reading and writing proficiency at the minimal level, and is returning to community college several years after leaving high school. He makes up as much as 50% of any entering freshman class, 50% found to need essential remedial work to succeed in college classes.

However, today **LITERACY IN NOT JUST A FORMAL SKILL,** to be developed within the metaphor of the 3 R's of reading riting, and rithmetic; **IT IS ALSO A POLITICAL DECISION.** These 3 R's are now supporting themes to a new set of 3 R's plus one: **REMEDIATION, RETENTION, RIGOR,** and **REFORM.** These new R's ask a different set of questions, the answers to which will form the subject of the debate of this decade, a debate in which we are already engaged.

FOUR CENTRAL POLICY ISSUES for developmental education and continuing education have emerged that underlie this debate: (1) Will open access to college continue? (2) Who will take the responsibility for raising the literacy levels of a student clientele underprepared to do college work? (3) To whom will the resources be allocated for this effort? (4) What is the rationale for the investment?

The responses to these questions vary according to recent reports:

- Kentucky is moving remedial education from four year colleges to community colleges.
- Florida is redirecting basic skills training to adult education and has established an academic floor for the colleges.
- New York is redirecting basic skills to high schools through funding formulas where no courses below the AA degree will receive funding.
- New Jersey has placed a limit on credits and financial aid if students take too long in remedial training.

- California is looking at an academic floor which will eliminate the lower level of remediation below 6th grade in the community colleges and will limit remedial instruction in the universities and state colleges.

- Oregon is limiting admissions to universities to students in the upper half of high school graduates and is proposing that neither the universities nor the state universities should offer remedial courses to admit students who need such courses.

Industry wants more emphasis on basic skills where it takes a 14th grade reading level to read a repair manual for an auto mechanic; students want more training in basic skills when raised reading and writing skills become increased economic opportunity. Yet, there is no state competency exam which requires more than a ninth grade reading level for high school graduation (Roueche, 1984).

As targets in the controversies about improving education, colleges are now developing responses. You, in this room today, can play an active role, for I believe that **TODAY IS THE BEST OPPORTUNITY BASIC SKILLS INSTRUCTION WILL HAVE TO BE INFLUENTIAL IN SHAPING THIS RESPONSE.**

My remarks today center around the problems and questions underlying the themes of reform, remediation, rigor, and retention and some solutions to these problems that can affect you. A cartoon featuring Charley Brown and some of his friends underscores my focus:

> *Peppermint Patty was talking to one of the younger characters who was preparing for his first day at school. She told him "Now when you go to school there are two things you always find. There are questions then there are answers, since there are more questions than answers, always be one to ask the questions."*

THE QUESTION OF REFORM:

The topic of **REFORM** is a prominent one in higher education today. It is a topic surrounded by issues; issues which need to be replaced with specific information that can be used by decision makers.

The basic players are twofold: (1) those external to institutions and (2) those internal in institutions. These external players include legislatures, state agencies, national commissions. The main question from an external viewpoint is **HOW TO IMPOSE QUALITY AT LESS COST?** The key questions from the institutional viewpoint are **HOW ARE WE SUCCESSFUL? WHO ARE THE SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS?**

Reform mandates then reflect four basic questions:

(1) Is the student the failure or the college program?

(2) How can instruction be improved?

(3) What skills and subjects are basic in the 1980's?

(4) Can colleges be effective and efficient with underprepared students?

Reform activities are numerous. In California in 1984, all segments of higher education are developing responses to these questions. It is popular now to designate these responses as **TOP DOWN RESPONSES** or **BOTTOM UP RESPONSES.**

The top down responses stress cost, program evaluation, new institutional policies on credit, systematic procedures for advisement, increased academic rigor, revised teacher roles. Reports from State Commissions, Task Forces and Legislative Subcommittees reflect the politicizing of learning and teaching problems. Their recommendations include: review, reorganize and reduce remediation; protect the quality of college credit but develop the needed skills competencies; do more for less and make the student fit the institution.

These responses reflect the business world bottom line mentality; they dwell on accountability, encourage intrusiveness from government agencies, value efficiency over effectiveness.

The bottom up responses that I will highlight include those developed by the Learning, Assessment, Retention Consortium of California, or LARC. These responses value college based efforts; encourage collaboration rather than competition and focus on strategies and activities that will increase learning and teaching effectiveness.

A key example of issues of educational change is that related to **REMEDIATION**, a major emphasis of the LARC Consortium.

Three major trends in remediation have emerged affecting colleges:

(1) The first trend is that a majority of college students are deficient in skills of reading, writing and mathematics. For example:

- Only 40% of students at Sacramento City College read at 13th grade level.
- John Roueche cites that nationally over 50% of students graduating from high school and entering college are reading below 8th grade level.

- All colleges from the Harvard type to community colleges offer remediation in some form to the same proportion of students - 50%.

- In Fall, 1982, 38% of entering students at UC Berkeley did not satisfy requirements for college composition. System-wide the University of California reported 56% of its entering students not eligible for college composition.

(2) The second trend is that there is a growing demand for higher skills competencies. The national director of education for the AFL-CIO estimates that by the 1990's, anyone who doesn't have at least a twelfth grade reading, writing and calculating level will be absolutely lost (Roueche, 1984).

(3) Third, the remediation of basic skills is the fastest growing area of curriculum (Keimig, 1983).

- In California, remedial courses increased 22% from 1979 and 1980.

- over half of mathematic classes offered nationally are remedial.

REMEDIATION:

The public debate has shifted the focus of remediation away from learning and teaching and increasingly entangled remediation in questions of institutional mission and purpose rather than learning and teaching.

FOUR KEY POLITICAL QUESTIONS underscore the nature of this debate:

1. What is the **SCOPE, PURPOSE** and **COST** of remediation activities in the community colleges? Is it worth the cost? Prove it?

2. **HOW MANY** students are succeeding in community college remedial instruction? Is it enough to justify the costs? Prove it?

3. Should remediation be a **FUNCTION** of the community colleges? Is it effective and efficient? Prove it?

4. Do students in remedial courses receive a **LOWER QUALITY** of **EDUCATION**? Is it worthy of college credit? Prove it?

The complaints about remedial education fall into several categories:

1. The single remedial course, which is the least effective of all efforts, is still predominant (Grant, 1978).

2. Heavy remedial doses in the long run do not remediate.

3. Education centered around basic skills may short change students with high abilities (Preer, p. 2).

4. An emerging complaint that the success in remedial course work does not readily transfer to traditional academic disciplines (Keimig, 1983).

5. The community colleges are doing too much remediation and should not compete with high school adult education.

The trends, the debate, and the complaints are affecting institutional planning and confusing decision makers as well as instructors but are the right questions being asked? Recent information collected by the LARC Consortium gives answers to other questions. Recent studies showed the following:

. A high percentage (83%) of students were satisfied with college programs.

. Students who take a reading course their first semester in college will successfully complete more units overall and will earn a higher GPA. (Cordrey, 1984).

. Completion of developmental writing prior to freshmen composition has a positive impact on student success.
  - They completed more units during the semester they were enrolled in developmental education.
  - They completed more units overall at the college (Boggs, 1984).

. The key requisite skill for success in college is reading.
  - That students reading below the tenth grade level do not succeed in vocational classes.
  - That students are successfully placed in writing courses with reading tests (Sacramento City College, 1983).

Of course, it is easier to raise questions than to give answers. Single colleges, knowledgeable individuals, professional organizations have been involved in developing solutions to the issues. However, we found the need for a unified voice speaking and working together on these issues. For the community colleges in California, the LARC Consortium approach has proved to be a powerful vehicle that has provided direction and coherence to college responses for reform mandates. As 70 colleges joined in a network, they have developed another set of questions and a comprehensive plan to act on these questions. Some of the details of this plan will be shared with you today.

RETENTION:

The retention of students in courses has become increasingly important as a quality indicator. The major focus of the LARC Consortium is to increase the success of students. The key questions it has addressed are: (1) **WHO** are the successful students? (2) **HOW** can the colleges increase success? and, (3) **HOW** will the colleges adjust to increase success?

THE LEARNING, ASSESSMENT, RETENTION CONSORTIUM OF CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

LARC is a network of individual community colleges which was formed to address common concerns related to students who are under-prepared in specific areas such as writing, math, and reading. The basic premise of the consortium is that assessment of student skills and placement of students in appropriate classes will lead to improved learning and retention of students. The basic goal of the consortium is to improve student success in college work. Originating in July, 1981, with fourteen colleges in Northern California, the consortium now includes six regional groups of California Community Colleges with more than seventy participating institutions comprising the LARC State Network of California. The consortium, too, has been proactive in placing issues and information before regional, state, and national organizations as well as individual institutions.

The colleges in the consortium developed and implemented an action agenda providing purpose, outcomes, and responses to key issues. This agenda highlights these premises:

- We need fewer edicts from above and more renewal at the college level.
- We need confidence in the work that we do.
- We need to provide evidences of our successes and outcomes.
- We are serious about improving quality.

Six major strategies or responses were developed:

1. In curriculum we found there is virtually universal agreement on the need to develop basic skills but there is much disagreement on how to achieve this effectively and efficiently.

   Our strategy is a comprehensive assessment, placement, learning, follow-up system that allows colleges to organize its resources and instruction to achieve improved learning and retention. We define assessment in its broadest terms to include assessment, advisement, placement, instruction and evaluation.

2. We found there is much agreement that the scope of remedial activities in the community colleges cannot be reduced because a majority of students are deficient but there is also a demand for remedial activities being more accountable and cost effective.

   The LARC response is to identify and share promising practices in remedial instruction through workshops, conferences, and publications.

3. We found there is a credibility problem with basic skills instruction. We all know its good for students but aren't effective advocates for it. We often don't know what and why we are doing it, or what it is.

   The LARC response is the use of faculty college teams. The member colleges urge a total institutional approach to assessment and uses college teams to promote an all college effort. The teams, with broad based faculty, student services and management participation, review and research data, participate in workshops, gather and share information and prepare college plans coordinating assessment and placement to the curriculum, budget and staff development.

4. We found that there is a lack of training of most instructors for teaching the underprepared adult population. Roueche cites that teachers in community colleges rarely talked with each other about literacy requirements of their individual courses and programs. Remedial instructors found that students in their remedial courses would be expected to read, write and figure more than would ever be required of them again in college (Roueche, 1984). Academic instructors assumed that a student's involvement in a remedial program guaranteed that he would be successful in the academic courses.

   The LARC response was to utilize visiting teams of faculty to plan and participate in training workshops bringing together faculty and staff from 15 to 70 colleges for dialogue and problem solving. Two state conferences and 15 regional workshops were sponsored this year involving over 1,000 participants.

5. Information, strategies, data need to be described and disseminated. Information politics is a major force in collegiate life, both internally and externally. The information load is so vast that it leads to dysfunction.

   LARC has stressed the development of products that can be disseminated...these products include:

- The LARC **PROGRAM GUIDE** published annually

- **DEFINITIONS** Related to Learning, Assessment, and retention. The proceedings of a 1982 workshop that developed working definitions of basic skills.

- **DIRECTIONS** for Learning, Assessment, and Retention. The proceeding of a 1983 workshop that featured models of assessment, remediation, for over 50 colleges in California.

- The LARC Assessment/Placement **MODEL**...a description of the guidelines and model.

- The LARC **FOLLOW UP MODEL**, the proceedings of a 1984 workshop that is developing a model for following up assessed students through college programs for use in program evaluation.

- By way of a commercial message, we would like to share our information with you. All of these are available for you to order.

6. Using specific data lessens criticism. Roueche found that most colleges could not document evidence of student success in their remedial programs; few know how many students complete a required remedial program; fewer still know how many low achieving students persist from remedial programs into regular college courses and with what success.

   LARC has developed a data base. When the LARC Colleges formed the consortium, they decided they needed to examine data over a number of years to see if LARC activities were making a difference to the college and the student.

Some of the data information from LARC colleges about assessment/placement includes the following:

At Sacramento City College, having tested for over five years and with around 90% of our students currently in an assessment program, we found the following about our students and their placement in English courses:

- Approximately 38% are reading at 13th grade or above and thus are eligible for college composition.

- Almost 20% are reading at the 11th and 12th grade levels, and are thus eligible for our pre-college composition course, English 57, which meets the proficiency requirements for the AA degree.

- Another 25% are reading between the 9th and 10th grade levels, and thus required to take remedial coursework before going on in English.

- 7% are reading at the 7th and 8th grade levels and they are also subject to remediation.

- And finally, 11% are reading at 6th grade levels and they, too are in our remedial classes. (Sacramento City College, 1983)

With this information, curriculum was adjusted to better ensure student success and provide needed training.

The effect of assessment/placement activities on cost, student success, and learner outcome can be significant. For example:

We have found that:

(1) A retention increase of even 3% meant a cost savings of $180,000 to a single urban instutition.

(2) Students who are not assessed and placed appropriately tend to drop out of courses more than those who are assessed and placed.

(3) Students who are assessed and placed appropriately earn higher grades than those who are not assessed and placed.

(4) Colleges that use assessment, improve their retention of students.

The joint data produced by the Consortium has shown us the effects of our assessment activities. This data base has grown from twelve participating colleges to fifty. There are four major data trends that we have observed over 1980-81, 82-- (1) There's been a dramatic increase in the students being tested for placement. Reading testing increased 39%; writing 21%; and math, 33%. (2) Student enrollments have increased in developmental education classes with the greatest growth being in math. (3) There have been shifts in staffing with a noted decrease in full-time equivalent in reading, writing and mathematics. We believe this is due to the rise of learning labs where much remedial instruction takes place. (4) Attrition rates are falling in the LARC Colleges. (In spite of serving more students, these colleges are showing improved retention rates.) Retention rates have increased in all three developmental areas:

- Reading increased 4.7%
- Writing increased 3.1%
- Math increased 4.9%

Other trends from the data which might be of interest include that many colleges are assessing additional areas other than reading, writing and math. For example, electronics students may be assessed in math. Preliminary data at Sacramento City College show an increase of 17% retention in the electronics program since using assessment (Renkiewicz, LARC Report, 1983).

Current activities which might be of interest include:

- The development of a model for following up assessed students from assessment through remediation to the general college classes looking at retention, presistence and completion and the development of a model for the evaluation of remedial programs.

The present and future most urgent need will continue to be the improvement of instruction. Future trends suggest new solutions that need to be sought and new questions to be asked. Future trends affecting basic skills instruction include:

- The systematic coordination of developmental objectives and activities into academic course assignments.
- Redefinition of basic skills to include higher level skills in problem solving, critical reading, critical thinking.
- Need to know which skills in developmental programs are transferred to regular course work.
- Cooperation between high schools and colleges which is one of the most important developments of the 1980's.

Future trends in networking include a project that would join the **WESTERN STATES OF CALIFORNIA, OREGON,** and **WASHINGTON** in a consortium to increase student retention and learning in community colleges with the states of Alaska, Arizona, Texas, and Hawaii interested in collaborating.

This **WESTERN STATES NETWORK** would seek a grant to implement six goals:

- Develop a regional network.
- Develop a comprehensive Assessment/Placement Program delivery/evaluation model on a **REGIONAL** basis.
- Develop a communication system to share information.
- Identify specific promising practices among participating community colleges in Assessment/Placement/Program Delivery/Evaluation.

- Determine if strategies are working by measuring student success within developmental education and within the general college curriculum.

- Provide staff development opportunities appropriate to implement the model.

CONCLUSION:

Improved remediation, retention, and rigor are achievable results. There is a maxim from the 60's that states if you aren't part of the solution, then you are part of the problem.

We, in the LARC Consortium, have found the need of a shared voice of many colleges speaking on key issues and using that voice to design and implement a plan for student success in community colleges.

WHAT KIND OF RESPONSE CAN YOU BE INVOLVED IN THAT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO YOU AND YOUR INSTITUTION?

I would like to suggest an agenda of 10 activities that can provide purpose and outcomes and a future focus for remedial education:

1. Create and make use of data base.

2. Develop a rationale for learning improvement. Be specific about this rationale.

3. Indentify your promising practices and share them.

4. Involve the total college in the new four R's. We need to all do well equally.

5. Link the remedial programs to the college mission. Provide for policy statements on remediation and retention.

6. Design and advocate a total delivery system of remedial instruction to replace your single remedial courses. Community education can play a central role in this system.

7. Assist faculty in academic programs to develop skills in teaching the underprepared student.

8. Define and measure student performance and success. There is a need for a national clearinghouse for dissemination of tested ideas, models.

9. Commit to the evaluation of your programs.

10. Collaborate - don't compete. We are now looking toward a future effort in state to state strategies.

Our situation in 1984 is not unlike that attributed to Gertrude Stein, the famous early 20th century poet. When Stein was dying, she turned to her companion Alice Tolkas and said, "Ah, Alice, what's the answer, what's the answer." Not hearing a response from Alice, she murmured, then "what's the question, then what's the question."

My goal was to define the issues of reform pertinent to adult and developmental education, and to describe solutions and responses. Such responses are in a dynamic state and reflect more questions than answers. Our responses may affect you in two ways:

(1) You can apply what we have learned to your campuses, and

(2) You can influence the responses being developed today on reform.

The challenge is that you as educators must develop political responses to questions of learning as the politicians are developing educational responses to political questions.

Today, instruction has the greatest influence that it will have, for reform is really planned improvement; and we in instruction are in charge of that. We welcome the challenge.

BD:rr

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